

The Urban-Rural Conflict is Central to Today's Global Dysfunction.
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Civilization began with the rise of cities (civilization means city building), some 5,000 years ago. To have such institutions as irrigation systems, professional armies, specialized priesthood, and professional artisans, population concentration is essential. Villages cannot produce such specialization.

Cities have always appealed to the ambitious, who love the colorful energy of city life, and refugees from the no-longer viable countryside. Successful cities attract talent; unsuccessful ones attract crime and anarchy. Both kinds have existed throughout human history, and are with us today.

Until the mid-20th century, the vast majority of people in the world were rural: mostly engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry, some in migratory life on the fringes of society. Today, most human beings live in cities, increasingly in mega-cities with populations 10 million and up.

Village or nomadic life has always depended upon a timeless rhythm of nature and unchanging culture. Survival depended on luck and total obedience to competent leadership and a long-tested culture. Community mattered; the individual did not. Because of ever-present danger coming from outside, the strongest had to rule. Ancient tribes had another problem: they never had enough child bearers, which was one of the earliest reasons for raiding and warfare.

Cities have always depended on good leadership and complex systems. Nomads never worry about human waste or unpolluted water because they are always on the move. Cities, however, depend upon setting up systems for bringing in water and disposing of waste. Ancient Rome owed its longevity to its expertise in handling water and waste. Dark Ages cities that failed to do this suffered from constant population decline from plagues or invasion by better led predators

Leadership must either be perceived as fair or have means of oppression at their disposal. This is so even today in the obvious difference between civilizations with participatory governance and those with authoritarian or totalitarian thugocracies.

Pressing elections on countries with a majority living in rural communities and educated minorities only in cities has had unforeseen consequences, the most obvious case being Egypt. Moreover, even cities with some educated populations (like Cairo) are being overwhelmed by migrants from the countryside---alas, who vote. These migrants are alienated, no longer nurtured by a community of relatives as they were in their villages. However, Islam's latest mode, militant and aggressive, has filled the role of community that these migrants have lost.

The demographic shift from rural to urban is now visible in the badly named \223Arab Spring.\224 An electorate that is largely illiterate overwhelmed the secular urban vote, giving Egypt an Islamist government. The cries of Islamist street demonstrators: \223Bread, Freedom, and Sharia (Islamic law)\224 has nothing to do with freedom; \223Sharia law\224 does not provide \223freedom\224 nor do the shouting men plan to give \223freedom\224 to their women and children. They do not know better.

While the disparity between urban and rural life is deadly in the under-developed world, it plays a role even in our own country. Those who idealize small town life exaggerate its virtues and also disparage great cities. Even the college- educated who work in such cities have moved to provide suburban life for their children. Fortunately this is beginning to change, as well-run cities attract families back. For those like myself, who remember our childhoods in wonderful cities, this is a welcome development.

Part of the still existing hostility against urban life comes from those fearful of immigrants manifested in anti-immigration hysteria. Floods of immigrants take some time to acculturate, and they do bring with them spikes in crime, a problem that can be mitigated with good governance.

Many of us are children of immigrant parents who wanted nothing more than to become American in every way. Those who succeeded become the philanthropists, doctors, musicians, and geniuses who make our culture shine. Today, much of our new economic vitality is the gift of hard working immigrants or foreign students whom we educate. This kind of immigrant we should welcome. Those with a violent agenda we should not

welcome.

It took 9/11 to make us love New York. Let's not continue the urban-rural dislikes. We are one country, not two worlds.

684 words

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